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THE MUSICAL TIMES,
And Singing Class Circular.
FEBRUARY 1st, 1852.

ENGLISH GLEE & MADRIGAL COMPOSERS.

No. III.

Contributed by E. Holmes, *Author of the "Life of Mozart,"*

The happy illustration of Cervantes conveyed in a story of Sancho, which proves that contending parties may sometimes be at once right and wrong in their judgments, is extremely applicable in the researches of musical history. A company is assembled about a wine cask to give an opinion on the contents. One of the judges declares that the wine tastes of iron, another says that it has a twang of leather. When the cask is empty, a little key with a leather thong attached to it is found at the bottom; both are thus found to be right, while both are wrong in so far as neither admits the discovery made by the other.

If we are misled in historical reading, it is chiefly through the imperfect statement of facts. With respect to the temperament and disposition which incline a man laboriously to investigate a critical or biographical subject, and to exhibit it with antiquarian zeal in all the lights afforded by curious reading, Hawkins was much better qualified as a musical historian than Burney. The history of Burney, except in the Handel era, appears to have been written much against the grain. He was too mercurial, too deficient in plodding industry for his task. He feared that he was writing what nobody would read, and delighted to escape from the dry statements contained in the body of his history to a joke or funny story in the foot-notes, in which he always excels.* He laments the hard fate of the historian, who in order, sometimes, to get on three lines with his book, is obliged to consume as many weeks in clearing up a single circumstance. This tortoise-like progression was not at all to his taste; and with his usual humour he compares himself at his work to "a wretch in the street, groping in the kennel for an old rusty nail"—a thing difficult to find, and of not much use when found.

The difference between our two historians may be thus put. Sir John Hawkins, a grave old gentleman, very fond of music and musicians, sits smoking his pipe in his arm chair in the chimney nook. His recollection of old stories, of interesting books, and of interesting people, is perfect; his whole being is wrapped up in the memory of the past; and having much to tell, a happy selection of anecdotes, and a total freedom from all affectation of the fine style and the elegant periods of modern writing, he gains upon you insensibly through his simplicity and good faith. His whole ambition was to leave a good, useful, and practical book; and he thought no labour too great to bestow upon it. The copy of his history, which he presented to the British Museum, abounds in curious and elegantly-written manuscript notes and additions, which are doubtless by himself, and which show with what affection he lingered over his subject to the last. Charles Lamb, no musician, but a good judge of books, found some of his favourite reading in the volumes of Hawkins.

Burney, on the contrary, has in him a dash of the fine gentleman, and the man about town. He is an admirable critic of the last new opera or singer—of a lively, cheerful turn in conversation, and very pleasant to meet at dinner. He cultivates a sort of Johnsonian style in his writings, which he sometimes maintains and sometimes fails in. He puts down important matters lightly upon hearsay, to save himself the trouble of examination; and his want of an ear thoroughly exercised in harmony, leads him, though a man of taste and candour, into many injurious and unfounded statements.

In referring to Burney's history, we are continually impressed with the necessity of a cautious reception of his opinions upon music, and not a little when he alludes to our Madrigal writers. The best of these are, in his opinion, "minor musicians," or "second class English masters." He has the following passage in a note, of which the reader may form his own judgment. Quoting a worthy nobleman and admirer of Handel, who had said:—"If some of that great master's oratorio-choruses were well performed by voices only, in the manner of madrigals, how superior would their effect be to the productions of your Bennets, Kirby's, Weelkes's and Wilby's?"—he adds:—"The idea was so just, that I wish to hear it put into execution; as there is *doubtless* more nerve, more science and fire in the worst of Handel's choruses, than in the greatest efforts of these old madrigalists."

That opinion, in the first place, is not founded in fact; and secondly, censure of English madrigal music formed on a comparison of different styles prevailing at a century-and-a-half distance, cannot be admitted. If some of Handel's choruses sing well without an orchestra, it is not in the least

* As a genuine thing in any style deserves its tribute of acknowledgement, let us quote some examples of Dr. Burney's fun. Deaf people it is said, hear best in a noise. In ludicrous illustration of this saying, Dr. Burney gives us an account of a lady so deaf that she could hear only while a drum was beating, insomuch that her husband hired a drummer as her servant, in order *to enjoy the pleasure of her conversation.*

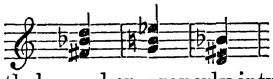
Another of his stories, concerning the humours of a city feast, is still better. While the haunch was carving, a simple fellow at table chose to entertain the company with a long account of the disease which carried off his father, during which all the prime cuts, and all the fat were, dispatched. This happened once, twice—but on the third occasion, as some one began;—"By-the-bye—just tell us what was that disorder your father died of," the man hastily rejoined,—"Sir, my father died suddenly," and fell to work as vigorously as the rest.

surprising, seeing that the composer bestowed his chief pains on his voice parts; but that any musician should prefer listening to an incomplete production, to our most masterly and complete works, only shows a curious personal predilection, and a taste not to be envied. The late Mr. Bartleman thought that Dr. Burney could not have heard any of the madrigals of Bennet, Wilbye, &c., when he speaks of them as so much "resembling each other in modulation and style, that they might well pass for productions of one and the same composer—no one towering above the rest sufficiently to give a modern ear the least idea of invention or originality." This opinion of Bartleman seems highly probable.*

Shakespeare, addressing his mistress in one of his sonnets, says of Dowland:—

> "Dowland to thee is dear, whose heavenly touch
> Upon the lute doth ravish human sense,
> Spenser to me"—

Burney, unwilling to contradict Shakespeare, admits that Dowland might have been a good player, but doubts whether he ever thoroughly understood composition, from want of early exercise. He is offended at these combinations in his works:--



which nevertheless, when properly introduced, are very good. Luca Marenzio, with whom Dowland was in correspondence, certainly did not think meanly of his compositions; and in proof of the general estimation in which he was held as a composer on the Continent, we learn that his works were printed in eight different principal cities, Paris, Antwerp, Cologne, &c. Dowland gives in his book of four-part songs, "with tablature for the lute," a copy of a most polite letter which he had received from Luca Marenzio, in which the latter signs himself *Affettionatissimo servitore.* Such beautifully-sounding words form the link between music and poetry. Perhaps they heretofore pleased the ear of Milton, who, describing his college impressions of the sonorous Greek language, talks of the "magniloquent words *lifted* by the Greeks, which would become the mouth of Jupiter."

The laborious Hawkins enables us to correct a mistake into which we believe we were led by Wood, in stating that Dowland died in Denmark. It seems more likely that he died at his house in Fetter-lane, Fleet-street. From this place he dates many of his last productions, and though he had been a great traveller, and received "kingly entertainment at foreign courts," making the personal acquaintance of eminent German musicians, and of Giovanni Croce and Luca Marenzio among the Italians, he came back, as our travelling countrymen are wont, to lay his bones in England. At his return he found the common disadvantages of old age to the artist who has made no provision. He was still lutenist to Lord Walden, but his circumstances were on the whole materially altered. He complains in the preface to the "Pilgrim's solace," of opposition both from singers and from the younger professors of the lute. He "wants means, leisure, and encouragement;" and in 1615, at fifty-three years of age, he departs this life in poor circumstances; there is reason to believe neglected and almost forgotten. The history of the artist and professor of pleasure seems to be pretty much the same in all times. While he is the fashion, he "begins in gladness;" but the rhyme in general closes too truly with "despondency and madness."

From Morley's "Introduction to practical music" we may gather some notions of the ancient practice of madrigal music in England. The pupil seeking instruction shows certain embarrassments to which he had been exposed on a visit. "Supper being ended, and music books according to custom being brought to the table, the mistress of the house presented me with a part earnestly requesting me to sing, but when after many excuses I protested unfeignedly that I could not, every one began to wonder; yea, some whispered to others demanding how I was brought up." Morley speaking of the old catholic composers, Fairfax, Taverner, Shepherd, Mundy, White, Parsons, and Bird, observes "that they never thought it greater sacrilege to spurn against the image of a saint, than to take two perfect concords of one kind together." Hawkins describes Morley as "a sensible, a learned, and a pious man, somewhat soured in temper by bodily infirmities, and more by the envy of some of his own profession." He died in 1604, after a lingering illness, which kept him confined for some years to the house in an ungenial and unwelcome solitude, which he a little relieved by occupation.

Of Bennet, the only additional information we can collect from Hawkins is, that he was indebted for patronage and for his musical education to Ralph Ashton, Esq., receiver of the Queen's revenues in the counties Palatine of Lancaster and Chester. Bennet was in all probability, therefore, a native of that part of the country, whose promising musical youth attracted the friendly notice of a country gentleman.

It is not known under whom Milton senior acquired his musical science. We are enabled the better to imagine the old house in Bread-street, to

* In proof of the unjustifiable levity and imprudence with which Burney sometimes set down passages upon composers in his history, see the following on Sebastian Bach, p.593, vol. iv. "He seems to have been constantly in search of what was new and difficult, *without the least attention to nature* and facility. He was so fond of full harmony, that besides a constant and active use of the pedals, he is said to have put down such keys *by a stick in his mouth* as neither hands nor feet could reach." Elsewhere, and with much the same foundation, in fact, he thinks that Bach had no melody. These mistakes are a blot upon his musical history, and are by this time wholly repudiated by the English nation, who better know the respect due to a great name.

Continued from page 330.

which Milton as a boy returned from St. Paul's school, and where the Rev. Thomas Young, afterwards Pastor of the English church at Hamburg, used to read classics with him, from its having the sign of the Spread Eagle. Hawkins insists upon carrying us inside the old place of business. "The furniture of a scrivener's shop was a sort of pew for the master, desks for the apprentices, and a bench for the clients to sit upon till their turn came to be dispatched." Milton's father seems not greatly to have relished his son's turn for poetry or politics, and would rather have seen him push his way in the church to some solid benefice or bishopric. The young poet wrote Latin elegies on several bishops and churchmen; and as the plague was frequently in England at this period, and "dreadful death, goddess fruitful to Tartarian Jove," spared neither sex nor age, he seldom wanted a subject. Milton's destination to the church led him frequently in boyhood to be a listener to the choral service in St. Paul's, which was near his school, and in his father's neighbourhood, and here listening, Hawkins thinks that he was inspired with that beautiful picture of the cathedral service which he has painted in Il Penseroso, in the well-known passage beginning—

> But let my due feet never fail
> To walk the studious cloisters pale.

Hawkins says of this cathedral, that "till it was destroyed by the fire of London it had perhaps the most venerable and awful appearance of any edifice of the kind in the world." Wilbye's chief patroness was Lady Arabella Stuart, concerning whose romantic history the reader may inform himself at length in "D'Israeli's curiosities of literature."

Many of the composers of the age of Elizabeth were skilful in logic, classics, mathematics, and other branches of academical acquirement, as well as in music. There are ancient monuments in York cathedral of organists who were famous logicians. Morley was taught the mathematics as well as music by his master, William Bird. Dr. Bull, the first Gresham professor, received a peculiar dispensation from Queen Elizabeth from the rule which obliged all the professors to deliver their lectures in Latin. He alone was permitted to speak English; but his want of ancient literature was no doubt looked upon at the time as a singular and very unusual deficiency. There are five madrigals and motets to English words for four, five, and six voices, by Dr. Bull, which are still preserved in the Tudway MSS.

The whole history of this period forms a delightful topic, because it concerns the rise and progress of secular music as a thing of domestic delight, formed upon, but growing entirely independent of, the church service. Madrigals gave birth to instrumental music — to quartetts and symphonies; and we are carried back through their records to epochs of our performance and composition, when the talents of Englishmen were even more prized on the Continent, than those of foreigners are at the present day among ourselves. Bull, who went abroad, was said to be travelling on account of his health; but the truth is, that he also wished to carry his attainments to a better market than England afforded. Elizabeth was parsimonious in her rewards to composers; and in the time of James I. patronage failed so much, that the musicians of the day began to dedicate their works to one another. Bull stayed in England a few years as first organist to King James, and in 1613, at about fifty years of age, quitted his native country for ever. He died in the north of Germany, where his influence may have even extended to the precursors of Sebastian Bach.

In Milton's "Tractate on Education," there is a little reference to the organ playing of his time, in which he speaks of the "artful and *unimaginable* touches" of the performer. Whoever has heard the late Samuel Wesley prelude on the manuals, may remember how perfectly well this expression applied to him—how uncommon he was, and how fond of what was new and unexpected. Something of this art existed in old times, when *extempore* powers were greatly valued. The echo of a great deal of excellent music is now a mere name, but we have an affection for those who began the instrumental art, and among these are Bull, and his master, Blitheman, and John Tomkins, whose monument was destroyed in the conflagration of old St. Paul's, with other English organists. The Tomkins family are eulogized by Christopher Simpson, author of the compendium, as "ever-famous, and never to be forgotten." Alas! for fame and the memory of good men.

Bull's portrait, painted in his 26th year, and preserved in the Music School at Oxford, has a mild expression, and an air penetrating and intelligent, The tombs of our old masters as frequently record the praise of their disposition and manners, as of their talents; and they are nearly all, without exception, sent to heaven in their epitaphs.

The virtues of these composers may have received somewhat more than the full measure of justice. Our old cathedral choirmen on the contrary, suffer all manner of evil impeachment, notwithstanding the excellent men brought up in their art, old Tusser and Camden, the historian, at home;—and abroad, Erasmus. Skelton in an allegorical poem has pictured "Riot" as a cathedral singer in ragged clothes, with his hair coming through a great hole in his hat. Cowley points a shaft at the profession in his poem "The Wish"—

> Always at church, just like the crows, 'cause there
> They build themselves a nest.

But the one who runs them down most amusingly is a certain Bishop of Salisbury, who has evidently at heart not so much the wish to reform their manners as to admire his own talent for epigram. He evidently chuckles over such sentences as the following :—

"The common singing men are a bad society, and yet a company of good fellows, that roar deep in the quire, deeper in the tavern. * * * Though they never expound the scripture they handle it much, and pollute the gospel with two things, their conversation and their thumbs. Upon working days they behave themselves at prayers as at their pots, for they swallow them down in an instant. Their gowns are laced commonly with streamings of ale, the superfluities of a cup or throat above measure. Their skill in melody makes them the better companions abroad, and their anthems abler to sing catches."

Hawkins, who prints this good-humoured abuse, puts in a claim of consideration for "decent and orderly men, and many of them exquisite artists." Drinking and dissipation, the vices of musical men as well as of some others, seem to be evils naturally consequent on a certain stage of musical progress. While madrigals were in fashion, a lady could preside and hand about the parts. But when the comic and convivial side of music was discovered, when catches, canons, and rounds with ludicrous words, and sometimes worse, carried merriment and enjoyment to a high pitch, then the aid of drinking was called in, and men resorted to taverns, to conduct their orgies by themselves. Hoffman, a German musical writer, says piquantly that "the devil puts his hoof into every thing," and certainly he did very soon into this our paradise of English music. We used to think that of the composers of the Restoration, who have been so much censured for immoral catches, that Purcell, Wise, and such scapegraces, bore the chief blame—but we have since found that the respectable Dr. Blow was as much involved as any of them. The manners of the age must excuse many faults of the past in singers, as well as in composers.

To be continued.

GRAND SONATA BY DR. GLEITSMANN.

(Contributed.)

This sonata does great honor to the inventive powers and taste of its composer. It is a real work of picturesque and imaginative art. The opening is gloomy and impressive, but the music becomes agitated as it breaks into the allegro. The melodies and their harmonising are interesting; and a certain clearness of design, simplicity, and breadth, recommend the whole of the movement as the work of a master. In particular we admire the burst into C major, and the fine introduction of the slow subject at the opening, as the bass at the end of page 10. The florid passages are principally arpeggios, and pertain more to the great style of Beethoven, than to the filigree work of the more modern composers. The Scherzo and Trio in F minor and D flat major, are melodious, energetic, and fanciful. The Adagio in A natural major, is of the style of Beethoven in the slow movement of the grand Trio, highly impressive and solemn in its melody, and accompanied by spreading harmonies, which embrace the whole extent of the pianoforte. There are passages of skips in the left hand, which are highly useful to master for the mechanical purposes of effective full playing. The last movement is fugal and contrapuntal, and not a little seasoned with mechanical difficulties. The whole work, however, yields more readily to the hand of a tolerably practised player than might be expected from its appearance. Dr. Gleitsmann is, we believe, an amateur; but he appears to us in the light of so excellent a musician in this production, that we have the greatest curiosity to see his other works, and how far he is able to differ from himself. It is of the highest importance that the true classical school of pianoforte music should not fall into entire neglect; and of the high promise of this first work there can be no doubt.

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Correspondence.

To the Editor of the "Musical Times."

Dear Sir,—The chanting of the Daily Psalms having become in this neighbourhood, within the last few years, pretty general, a great deal of argument has naturally arisen as to the time Chants for the above use, and also for the Canticles during Morning and Evening Prayer, should be taken, I mean that portion of the Chant which is sung in strict time; and as the *Musical Times* with us is considered in all musical matters an authority, we shall feel much obliged if, through the medium of your excellent periodical, you will, as far as we are concerned, set the matter at rest by stating the time you conceive Chants ought generally to be taken, as indicated by Maelzel's or Greaves' portable metronome. By so doing you will greatly oblige, Dear Sir, Yours,

Wakefield, January 19th, 1852. Tempo.

[We give the above letter from the interest felt upon the subject, premising that we venture to offer our opinion with a knowledge of the different notions entertained, as to what is the proper mode of chanting. It appears to us that the words should be read at an easy and rather quick rate, and that the pitch or intonation of the syllables should vary according to those indicated by the notes of the chant.